

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Clyde Silva

Clyde Silva was born on April 15, 1953 in Pāhala on the Big Island. He grew up along with his five siblings in Pāhala, where his father, George Silva, Jr., worked for Hawaiian Agricultural Company (eventually called Ka'ū Agribusiness Company).

While he was a student at Ka'ū High School, Silva worked summers covering seed at the plantation. Upon graduation, he began working in the crop control department and then as a harvesting radio dispatcher. After a layoff in 1975, Silva worked for about seven years for Punalu'u Black Sands Restaurant. He was then rehired at the plantation, where he held various jobs including senior crop control worker and purchaser for the garage. When Ka'ū Agribusiness Company closed in March 1996, he was the purchaser for the warehouse. He stayed on for two more months to close out the warehouse.

After a two-month period of unemployment, Silva began working for Mauna Loa Macadamia Nut Corporation in Kea'au.

Tape No. 26-13-1-96

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Clyde Silva (CS)

Pāhala, Hawai'i

November 2, 1996

BY: Holly Yamada (HY)

HY: Okay, let's start with when and where you were born.

CS: I was born on April 15, 1953, here in Pāhala, Hawai'i. At the old plantation hospital [Pāhala Hospital] at that time.

HY: And what were your parents doing?

CS: My mom [Amy Silva, née Cordeiro] was a housewife, and my dad [George Silva, Jr.] was a seed-treating plant operator at the plantation [i.e., Hawaiian Agricultural Company], yeah.

HY: At---was it called Hutchin[son] . . .

CS: No. He started out when it was first called Hawaiian Agricultural Company. Then it was later changed to Ka'ū Sugar Company, [Inc.] when we merged [with Hutchinson Sugar Company, Ltd. in 1972]. It was [later] changed to Ka'ū Agribusiness Company, [Inc.].

HY: And were your parents immigrants?

CS: No. My mom was born in Kona. My dad, I believe, was in Pepe'ekeo. My grandmother, my mom's mother, was an immigrant. No. My grandmother was the only one born here in the islands from her family. Her brothers and sisters and her parents came over on the boat. But she was the only one born here in Hawai'i.

HY: What do you know about her family background? Do you know much about her family background?

CS: My grandmother?

HY: Yeah. Like how they made a living and that sort of thing.

CS: 'Kay. Well, my great-grandmother would bake bread, she'd take in people's laundry. My great-grandfather used to haul freight by horse and wagon. And they would go down to Kailua, pick up the freight, and come all the way back up to Kealahou where they lived, and that's the area they delivered the freight to. And he was also a part-time bus driver.

HY: A bus driver.

CS: Mm hmm [yes].

HY: Hauling---for passengers?

CS: School.

HY: School bus.

CS: School bus.

HY: Oh, I see. Okay. And that was your great-grand . . .

CS: That was my [maternal] great-grandparents. My grandmother and grandfather, my mom's side, my grandfather was—basically he liked ranching, doing ranch work. And my grandmother was a housewife. And they moved all over the island, going from one ranch to the next, from Kona to. . . . They lived in Mountain View and went back to Kona again, then they would move back. They went to Nā'ālehu, they went back to Kona. He was a truck driver, where he would go in and they used to haul the sugar in bags and take it down to the wharf in Hilo. And he also would drive the truck in to pick up all the immigrants that are coming from the Philippines and places like that and bring them back to Pāhala. And he eventually ended up as a power plant operator at the plantation here [i.e., Hawaiian Agriculture Company].

HY: What became Ka'ū Agribusiness.

CS: Yes. Until he retired.

HY: That's your [maternal] grandfather.

CS: On my dad's side, my grandmother was a housewife, and my grandfather was a blacksmith here at the plantation. And he was the last blacksmith that they had here when he retired.

HY: What is his name?

CS: George Silva, Senior. And they also resided here down at the old Portuguese Camp. You know where the theater---you say you passed the theater, the Pāhala Theatre. If you notice on the right, there's another building, and there's a bigger building. Right in the back there, that whole section we call Portuguese Camp. And that's where they lived. In fact my parents had their wedding reception in their front yard. (Laughs) So it's neat, it's neat.

HY: Where in the birth order are you?

CS: I am the second child of six and the oldest son.

HY: Oldest son.

CS: Yeah, I have a sister who's older than me, and I'm the second. But I'm the oldest boy. We

had three boys, three girls in our family.

HY: So you said you were born in the plantation hospital [Pāhala Hospital].

CS: The old plantation hospital. That was before the one that's down by the highway now. The old plantation hospital is right below here. You know where you turned off, where that big, wide area there that looks like a parking lot. That's where the old hospital was. So, in fact, all of us except for my youngest brother was born in that hospital. My youngest brother was born in the new one [Ka'ū Hospital].

HY: What do you remember about small kid time, growing up on the plantation? What kind of community was it?

CS: It was, and still is, a rather close-knit community. Basically all our parents worked for the plantation. And that was basically the way of life that we knew. It wasn't as modern as it is now, although this isn't a very modern town, as you know. But we, as children, had a lot of fun. I mean, we basically played with very basic things. We didn't have much toys and things like that. If you got a bike, that was a treasure. You know, that sort of thing. We made like our own slingshots and . . .

HY: So you did have time for recreation as a child.

CS: Yeah. As a child, yes. We had a lot of fun, really. A lot of family gatherings. There were a lot of children in the community at that time. So that made it fun. But since then, they've all grown and moved out. So it's basically just the older people here. There are a lot of young ones staying, who have tried to make their residence here in Pāhala, and they have a lot of children. So the community again is starting to thrive with a lot of children. But for a while there, it was basically hardly any children around. So it's like now a second boom phase. But it was exciting. We had a lot of fun as children.

HY: And did you play with---was it like all the kids in the community, or were there little pockets of different ethnic groups, for example, that would play together?

CS: It was basically, I think, we would play with the kids in our camp area.

HY: So in Portuguese Camp.

CS: Yeah, like, you know, the Portuguese, whoever lived in Portuguese Camp all more or less played together. They walked to school together, went home from school together. Same thing like Korean Camp, Japanese Camp, this area here is New Hawaiian Camp, and the Old Hawaiian Camp was down below here. But it was very ethnic way back even before my parents' time. But then it integrated, I guess, yeah, as time went on. But although we still referred to it as camps until we had a street system put in. But we were close-knit with, basically, the people in our camp or in our relatives' camp, per se. You know, like, we lived in New Hawaiian Camp. My grandparents lived in Portuguese Camp, one side. And the other---where the shopping center stands, where this house was, prior to that my grandparents' house. And that was the thing, New Haole Camp, I think it was called. It was more the rich people, or the supervisory people would live along that road.

HY: But they still worked for the plantation.

CS: They all worked for the plantation. In fact, I think at one time, everybody in this town worked for the plantation. That was all that was available. Either the plantation or the ranch, Kapāpala Ranch. There was some, well, even per se what you call homesteaders, you know, who have their own land, and they grew cane and things like that. That was basically, again, it was their own private business. But yet the plantation maybe had a managing contract as to the harvesting segment of the crop and things like that.

But at one time, too, the camps were separated. We did not only have Pāhala, we had like Moaula Camp, Kusumoto Camp, Wood Valley, Kapāpala Camp, and they were all up in the cane fields. And each camp had their section of the plantation that they would take care of. And eventually, as time went on, those homes were all moved down to Pāhala and added on to this section above where I live, all that top street. They were all houses that were bought from the other camps. And they just brought everyone together and centralized it. But at one time, they had different camps, and different people lived in those camps. And like I said, they just basically worked in the area where they lived. There was very little transportation at that time, but they all had their little store, or, you know, convenient things for them. But that was all run by the plantation.

HY: When did the consolidation, do you remember, roughly when . . .

CS: I was in high school, so . . .

HY: In the late [19]60s.

CS: The late [19]60s, yes. 'Cause I remember being in school and seeing the houses being moved on the trucks. And I could watch (laughter) and you see the guinea grass field, and all of a sudden you see this house floating along. (Laughter) So it was very weird. (Laughs) But I remember going in class, and all of a sudden you see this house moving, I said, "Oh, my, what's going on?" But then after they set things up, we all got to know what was going on. And then people starting moving from the other camps down to Pāhala. And some moved up to that section from the lower camps there. But that I think was what more or less merged all the camps into one community here.

HY: And did you go to---is it Ka'ū Elementary School?

CS: It's Ka'ū High and Pāhala Elementary [School]. 'Cause we didn't have a high school at one time. It was just elementary. And then eventually built the high school. And then the kids in Nā'ālehu go there till eighth grade, and then they're bussed here to Pāhala to go to the high school.

HY: So did you graduate from the high school here?

CS: Yes.

HY: And then did you continue your education?

CS: No, I went to work right after school.

HY: Did you work while you were in school?

CS: During the summer, yes.

HY: What would you do?

CS: Things like covering seed. You know, the cane seed. I spent two summers doing that. The last summer, when I was a senior, my dad was, at that time, the overhead irrigation operator. They had cane fields below Pāhala here where you see the macadamia nut trees now. But that was all irrigated with overhead guns. So I worked with him for one summer. And after that, I was offered a position in the ag[riculture] research department. Crop control department.

HY: And what was your position there?

CS: I was a crop control worker.

HY: Crop control worker.

CS: Yes.

HY: Okay, what is that? Can you elaborate on that?

CS: It is going out and taking cane samples from all the different varieties in the various cane fields, in fact, in all the cane fields. Each cane field used to be sampled. [We] used to go out, take a cane top sample every five weeks, I think it was. And we would come back and break them apart, chop 'em up, dry 'em, and you find out all the nutrient factors and things in there. You know, [if it] needed to be fertilized, the growth, if it's ripe enough to be harvested, things like that. And then we used to put in different variety tests, where new varieties were being tested to see which ones would do best out here. And we used to keep all the weather data also.

HY: Did you need special training for that? Or did you kind of learn on the job?

CS: On the job, basically. In fact, most jobs on the plantation you would learn on the job, unless it was some specialized field, like maybe electrician. Plumbers, even, they learned on the job. And of course the superintendent position, higher supervisor positions where they needed some engineering background, things like that, [in order to] qualify them [for the job]. But I'd say 90 percent of the jobs, we learned on the job.

HY: I just want to backtrack a little bit about your elementary school days. Can you sort of describe what a typical day might be like? You know, for example, how many kids are in your class.

CS: At that time, I think, we averaged maybe about twenty-five students to a class.

HY: That's per grade?

CS: Yeah, per grade.

HY: It's for students from all the different camps then?

CS: Yeah. Yeah, at that time, until everybody moved to Pāhala, yeah, they had busses that would pick up the kids and bring them down. Or the parents would drive them down if they had a vehicle. But it was basically reading, writing, and arithmetic. That's basically what you learned in elementary. And it's not compared to what they're having today with computers and high technology. I mean, we didn't even have Dr. Suess [children's author] at that time. It was, "See Spot run." "See Dick and Jane." Things like that, that kind of books that we read. Math was basic, simple, until you got into high school.

HY: Who were the educators in your school?

CS: At that time, most of the teachers were residents here. And it's very few commuters like today. Today, I think, 80 percent of the staff commute out of Hilo.

HY: Oh, the teachers.

CS: The teachers. But when I was in elementary, and even in high school, our teachers all lived here. And it was a better situation due to the fact that they were here and they supported whatever activities we did. If you needed your teacher, they'd be there for you after school to help you out. It was a more personal relationship. You knew who your teacher was, and you got to know as a person. That made school fun, I think. And we felt more comfortable and close due to that fact.

HY: Do you think that's a common sentiment now? That people wish that the educators were from Pāhala?

CS: I think so. Because right now, to be honest, I feel sorry with the kids, the children, due to the fact that their teachers are not here if they need them, per se, after school. They're not here if they need to call them, and then be close by in case they have a problem with their homework. There's not that close relationship between the teacher and student. You know, I don't think the teachers really get a chance to know the student or the child. Whereas when they were residents here, they grew up with the children around them. They knew their family. They knew their family background, things like that. But teachers coming from other areas have no idea. They have no idea. And I think that's a disadvantage for the children, really. For me, anyway, that's the way I feel, because I think we. . . . Feeling more comfortable, it made us do better in school. And to have that help when you needed it, and to know the teacher and the teacher knowing you, it really made a big difference in your learning capabilities.

HY: Let me just stop for a second. I noticed this . . .

(Taping is interrupted, then resumes.)

HY: Okay, now since your father was working the plantation, did you get a sense that's maybe something that you would want to do? Or how is it that you came to work with the plantation as well?

CS: Well, the plantation has been really the only way of life we knew, growing up as children.

And at that time, we just assumed that the plantation would be here forever. And growing up in the plantation town, you knew about the company, you were familiar what was going on, you knew who was doing what, and so it was an easy transition for me, coming out of school and needing a job and going to work. Like I had to work, 'cause at that time, the wages were very low. And we had a big family. You know, they were . . .

HY: For economic reasons.

CS: For economic reasons I had to go to work, help out. 'Cause my dad was struggling, you know, to take care of us as a big family that we had. And my mom was a housewife raising us children. So I went to work to help out the situation.

HY: Now was that true with your siblings too? Did they also feel they needed to contribute financially to the family?

CS: No, 'cause when I sort of went to work, I wanted them to go on to college, pursue their education, something that I couldn't do, because I needed to work. I mean, I don't regret it. But like my sister below me, six years difference, and she wanted to go to college. She's very intelligent, and so I helped her. Like I would buy her bus ticket for her. She would commute on the bus to college in Hilo every day. And that's the way she wanted to do it. She didn't want to stay in the dorm or get an apartment or anything like that. But she went to university and graduated. My brother Michael wanted to work. He was the next one below. He went and worked for the plantation until he got laid off too. And my sister Michelle, she's taken care of by her husband, so she just basically baby-sits. She never went to work for the plantation. My brother Chris, who is twenty years younger than I am, there was no future at that time already at the plantation for him. So he's working as a construction worker down in Nānāwale area. So he relocated from here. My sister Terry, when they married, they relocated to Hilo. My oldest sister married, they moved to Honoka'a—her husband is from Honoka'a. And he also worked for the plantation at that time, at the Hāmākua Sugar Company, and he also got laid off. And now he works at the Hyatt [currently called the Hilton Waikoloa Village]. But like I said, as kids, we basically just knew the plantation way of living, that style.

HY: Now, this is just a little bit about your family home life. For example, chores. You took the responsibility of working when you were pretty young. What about the work around the house?

CS: We all had our own chores to do. We were all designated things to do. Like my sister helped with the laundry, the other one would do the dishes, the other one help with the cooking. We as boys basically helped with the yard work. My dad used to work cleaning other people's yards part time, and we would go and help him. And not only our parents but our grandparents would go and help them. Like my grandfather also used to do yard work for people. And I remember me going to help him in doing his yards.

HY: This is your father's father?

CS: My mother's father.

HY: Your mother's father.

CS: My dad's father, he had a huge garden in his yard that he used to take care of, and he also used to raise pigs and chickens, ducks. And so after work, that's what he did, feeding the animals or working in—he had a beautiful big garden. And he was really, truly blessed with a green thumb. I mean, he could just grow anything. And that was his joy.

HY: Was that the main food source, would you say?

CS: Not the main, but I'd say at least half of it. And then we'd go and help them. Like they raise their own pigs and things, and we used to go and help making sausage. You know as a family, we'd have to go down and help when it came time to making sausage, and things like that.

HY: Now, was that for commercial use as well, or just for the . . .

CS: Just for the family. Just for the family. Like some people would come and buy the pigs from my grandfather for private parties and things like that. But that's about as far as it went. Sausagewise, we just basically made for our family or neighbors. 'Cause at that time, everybody basically grew what they needed. And as time went on, that's when they started buying a lot more things, so it's more convenient. But then my grandparents' era at that time, they basically grew everything. And that's how we learned. And I wish I'd learned more now that they're gone. Even, you [they] used to speak Portuguese. But my parents were told that they're to answer in English. But my grandparents and my great-grandparents would speak in Portuguese. That's how, as a child, like my grandparents used to take me to Kona, to my great-grandmother's house and they'd speak Portuguese, and that's where you kind of pick up a few things, a few words, and kind of understood what they were talking about. But we were not allowed to answer in Portuguese. We had to all answer everything back in English.

HY: Did they tell you why they wanted you to do that?

CS: Because my great-great-grandparents were immigrants here, and they wanted you to learn the language here.

HY: Are you Portuguese on you mother's side as well?

CS: Yes, on both sides. Both sides.

HY: Okay, just coming back to your working career. After you did the crop . . .

CS: Ag research, crop control worker.

HY: . . . crop control, then how long did you do that for?

CS: I was there roughly two years, and then I went to become a harvesting radio dispatcher. At that time, the cane trucks all had their own radio system, and they had their own clocks in there that would tell more or less how far they were from the factory. They had buttons that they could press, like if the crane was loading them, then route to the factory, then route to the field, things like that. And we had a monitor, and that's how we used to keep track of all the cane truck drivers at that time. And in [19]75, that's when they had the work force reduction, a major one at that time. And they eliminated those positions. And so I got laid off

time, back in '75. It was Christmas of '75.

And then Punalu'u Black Sands Restaurant was reopened in March, after the tsunami hit Punalu'u. [In November 1975, there was earthquake or tsunami damage throughout the Big Island.] And I went in as a waiter, I was hired as a waiter, and housekeeper. And I eventually worked my way, basically learned every position that was available and ended up as assistant manager. And I was there about six and a half years before my former boss, who was my crop-control boss at that time, called me and offered me a position back here at the plantation, which was at a higher rate of pay than what I was making at Punalu'u.

And so I came back. I went back to crop-control department again. I was senior crop-control worker at that time. That was basically---I took care of registering all the weather data, and I inputted all our past data for the last ten years into the computer base, and we computerized the whole cultivation department, ag[riculture] crop control, and cultivation as a whole. So I was doing more data-entry work at first, then working with the programmer, establishing our reports and records.

HY: This would be in the early [19]80s.

CS: This was in '81, ending part of '81.

HY: Back to the, you know, in '75 when you got laid off, was that a big layoff?

CS: I think we went from 700 workers to 350 workers at that time.

HY: Where did most people find work, if they did, when they were laid off?

CS: A lot of people were taking early retirement. They gave 'em an incentive program for the retirees to. . . . It was like a bridge retirement plan that they had. And so a lot of them retired, so that those who were laid off would have the chance to continue working in other positions that the people retired from. Some of 'em did move away to find jobs elsewhere.

HY: Now was that as a result of the merger [in 1972], or was that. . . . 'Cause that happened a couple years before, then. Right, the merger was . . .

CS: No, it was because of the poor sugar prices at that time.

HY: Oh, I see.

CS: The sugar price subsidy program was at an all-time low. They just couldn't afford it, so they had to cut back. The merger did have some effect on it also.

HY: Do you remember how you felt about it at that time?

CS: Well, at that time, we were unaware that this was coming about. And we all thought that in the position we were was a pretty stable position, something that they would have kept. And one day, they just called all us dispatchers in the office and they told us that as of December 24, that's your last day of work. We're doing away with that radio system. And at that time I was living in Nā'ālehu. I was renting a house in Nā'ālehu. I was just devastated at that time.

HY: How much notice did they give you?

CS: About two weeks. Just about two weeks.

HY: So then when you came back [to work for Ka'ū Agribusiness Company], then, and you were doing data entry and this more technical work, I suppose, how long did you do that for?

CS: I did that for about three years, I think it was. And then I was offered the position of being the garage-store keeper, to purchase all the items needed for the motor-pool area. My last position was in charge of the warehouse of doing all the purchasing for the company, not just the garage section.

HY: Let me just stop the tape. I think it's a good time to flip it over.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

HY: Okay, this is a continuation of the Clyde Silva interview, in Pāhala. It's November 2, and the interviewer is Holly Yamada. I forgot to do that at the beginning of the first tape. Okay, let's see. Okay, you were living in Nā'ālehu when you got laid off. And then you came back here.

CS: To Pāhala.

HY: And as you were saying, you renovated your . . .

CS: Parents' home.

HY: Now was this a plantation home . . .

CS: Yes.

HY: . . . that was provided for by the company?

CS: In the past, you could rent their homes, and then eventually, the plantation decided to sell all the homes and get out of the rental program. And so my parents—same here with my grandparents and all, whoever had homes—could purchase 'em. And they were running at that time about \$7,000, house and lot. And basically, everybody just purchased all their own homes.

HY: Were there people that were unable to purchase their homes, or just . . .

CS: Some people just decided to continue renting. In fact, there's still some today that are still renting.

HY: Okay, so you came back. Oh, let's just backtrack a little bit. Now where were you living when you were working at the restaurant?

CS: Living here in Pāhala.

HY: Oh, you were.

CS: Yes.

HY: Oh, so this was in the renovated . . .

CS: Right.

HY: Okay.

CS: When I got laid off in '75 from the plantation, that's when I moved back here.

HY: Oh, okay.

CS: Then I started work in March at the restaurant.

HY: Okay, so then you came back here and were re-hired after working . . .

CS: After working in Punalu'u for six and a half years.

HY: Okay. And then how long were you at that position, where you were doing the data entry and the. . . .

CS: It was longer than that. It was closer to seven years. Yeah, I think it was closer to seven years.

HY: And then you got into the purchasing.

CS: Then I did the garage purchasing. And I was there for about four years. Then I was transferred to the warehouse when my predecessor retired. And I stayed there the balance of the time.

HY: Okay, now what did you do at the warehouse? Can you just kind of elaborate on that?

CS: I basically did all the purchasing for the company. Whatever they needed, from the office down to the yard-person. And anything they needed—forms, supplies, anything for the factory . . .

HY: Factory equipment?

CS: Yeah, fuels, anything. So that was pretty extensive.

HY: And that takes you all the way up to this March when you got laid off?

CS: I got laid off in May. The plantation closed in March, and they kept me on for two more months so that I could close up the warehouse and close up all my accounts with the vendors and things that I dealt with. And to wait until they finished having the auction that they did,

selling the equipment and things like that. Since some of the stuff in the warehouse were put on sale too. But they kept most of the factory items, 'cause that's supposed to be sold with the factory. So, it was just a matter of staying on to close out the warehouse.

HY: Did you have a sense, anywhere along the line, that this is a business that was not going to last? Was not going to take you through your full career?

CS: Well, probably within the last five years, we sort of knew something was happening. Nothing really concrete until only three years ago. And more so after one year ago, when they had the contract negotiations.

HY: Now was that when the union [ILWU, International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union] members voted not . . .

CS: Not.

HY: . . . to accept the cuts?

CS: Right. They [C. Brewer, the parent company of Ka'ū Agribusiness] wanted them to take a wage reduction, and they refused to. The majority said no. By that time, Hāmākua [Sugar Company] was closing, and a lot of them based their decision on the problems Hāmākua was having, which to me I thought was wrong. Because the Hāmākua situation, Ka'ū Agribusiness, is totally different. That was privately owned, Hāmākua. If C. Brewer had to claim bankruptcy, they had to shut all their operations, and they're not only affiliated with sugar. Punalu'u Resort was theirs. They sold that. But Punalu'u [Bake Shop] sweet bread is theirs. Mauna Loa Macadamia Nut [Corporation], Superior Coffee [& Foods/Hawai'i], things like that. And they weren't going to sell or shut down all these operations and claim bankruptcy.

But they [the workers] were misled in making their decision. And probably if they did agree to take the 10 percent cut, we probably would still be in operation today. In fact, we were already planning how we were going to modify operations to survive. But then we got word that they had voted it down. So we just scrapped all our plans. Meaning management side was also meeting when they were meeting [for the vote] and deciding the future.

HY: So were you disappointed that they voted that way?

CS: I was very disappointed, because my concern was what's going to happen to them, what's going to happen to the community. Excuse me.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

CS: So disappointing, though.

HY: Was that unexpected? Did you have a sense that people were feeling that way? Or did that surprise you?

CS: I knew some people had their minds made up, saying that they were not going to go for it. But I thought there was enough of a majority to carry it. I was disappointed. It wasn't what I

expected.

HY: Was that vote something that was divisive within the community? Or did people sort of recover after the decision was made?

CS: Some of the people were collecting, like, unemployment [insurance] and things like that. They were doing fine. I think it will be—now that their benefits are going to be running out—that we'll have to see how either people are bound together, or each will go its own way. And I hope it's where they will still keep together as a community and try to help out each other. But it's just little too early yet to see the effect of what's really going to happen now.

HY: Yeah, it's only been . . .

CS: Because they were able to get unemployment benefits up till the end of October. So they probably just received their last check. So now I don't know what's going to happen. It's kind of scary when you think about it.

HY: Do you remember where you were when you first heard that the last day of Ka'ū Agribusiness?

CS: I was at work at the warehouse. And my boss called me and told me that [J.W.A.] "Doc" Buyers [chief executive officer for C. Brewer] had made the decision of closing, and it was probably going to be at the end of March. And they stuck to that.

HY: Do you remember how you felt at that time?

CS: I guess they were trying to call---when I think about it now, the union was trying to call the company's bluff. But the company, Buyers, made the decision to close it. I was, I was just torn by it. To me, this didn't have to happen. And that is what upset me the most. If people had given it more thought and really thought of the consequences before they. . . . It's hard to say how they were. It's not [that they were] railroaded into voting the way they did. I think it was more out of ignorance of the situation and the surrounding situations of the other plantations, like Hāmākua and what was going on there, that scared them, where they thought that they weren't going to have anything. Which was foolish, I thought, for them to think so. But people are different, yeah?

HY: What type of role do you think the union had in terms of guiding them to make that decision?

CS: I think the union had total control as to which way they were going to vote. I really think that they influenced them one way or the other. Because they were basically all union members. Maybe part of the reason, the union did not explain to them the whole total situation of what may occur. I mean, I'm not anti-union or anything. It's just that I think the situation could have been handled a lot better. At least, you know, if we had that three years, it would have bought some time to maybe establish some other alternative industry or company where the people could find jobs, instead of being just left without anything. (Clock chimes are audible in the background.)

HY: What about your last day there. What was that like?

CS: My last day was very hard, personally, because it was all so very emotional, being that the supervisors who were still employed stopped by and said thank you, you know. Now, I guess they appreciated what I'd been doing for them at that time. And some came down just to say good-bye and to see the warehouse for the last time. And it was hard. It was hard, you know, to pack up your stuff after working for a company for so long, and to shut the doors. It's such an empty feeling. But for me I accepted the fact, and I knew my life would—you know, I'd have to make something else of my life.

But it was still hard to let go. 'Cause it's like a way of life that I had to let go. And although I still work for C. Brewer, it's not the same. It's a totally different environment. I don't know the people, it's a new industry for me. I mean, I have supervisory experience, granted. But it's like starting all over again. It's like learning everything all over again. Total new industry, learning people, and the people there are not people from here in the community where I live. Like here, I know most all the people, their history. There, I don't know anything about them.

HY: This is with mac[adamia] nut farms?

CS: Mauna Loa Macadamia Nut Corporation, in Kea'au. It's also [C.] Brewer owned.

HY: C. Brewer.

CS: Mm hmm. But it's just a whole total different environment. It's not so much the commuting, it's just the work environment itself is just totally, totally different. Like I said, I feel lost.

HY: The work environment in terms of, just because you aren't [familiar] with the faces there?

CS: The faces, the people, their personalities, and . . .

HY: Is the work itself actually different too?

CS: The work is different from what I've been doing, yes. I've never worked with macadamia nuts in a factory. The extent we went here was just harvesting and husking, and then the nuts were transported to Kea'au. Now I'm on the other side in Kea'au, receiving the nuts and producing the products. So, you know, it's different. Although I understand some of the aspects of the macadamia nut side, through the purchasing and dealings with the supervisors. But not to the full extent that I'm involved with now.

HY: How did you get that position?

CS: The position was advertised in the *Hawai'i Tribune-Herald*, and I put in an application through our human resources department down here, being it's the same parent company. And I know couple of the supervisors who work there, and they know my history here also. And I was accepted for the position.

HY: How long did you go without work?

CS: Two months. Two months. I got laid off the end of May, and I started work August 12, about two and a half months.

- HY: What did you do for support, either financially, emotionally? Who did you turn to?
- CS: I more or less just turned to myself really, and just my family. But it was just keeping myself busy, you know, doing things around here that I wasn't able to do because while I was working. Just a lot of catching up on things, chores and things around here. And spending time with the family and trying to go out and find work, which took a lot of time. That's a lot of exams, a lot of applications, lot of interviews.
- HY: Were you able to continue medical insurance or . . . ?
- CS: Yes, they provided medical. We just had to pay for our own coverage. The company, I have to say, they did not just leave the employees stranded. They sort of helped them along the way—in providing medical, they [the workers] could still rent their homes. It wasn't where everything just came to a screeching halt and say, "You're out, you're on your own, good-bye, good luck."
- HY: Do you know anything about church involvement?
- CS: Well, I'm very involved in the church. And I know the Catholic church here, for the first month or so in March, we really dwelled on emotions of people, how to deal with it, services available for people who need help, things like that.
- HY: Did they provide services? Or did they direct them to people that could provide services?
- CS: Some of the services provided, like the Foodbank, is Catholic church affiliated, and they assisted in guiding people to the right source of help that they need.
- HY: Now, you're involved in Huliau [O Ka'ū]? Is that right?
- CS: Yes.
- HY: Now, can you explain a little bit about what that is?
- CS: Okay, Huliau [O] Ka'ū is a grass-roots, nonprofit, community organization. It was basically started with people here who were without work.
- HY: Was this a result of the layoffs?
- CS: Yeah. And it was one way of trying to establish an organization that would help these people, again, through educating them, reeducating them, helping them find a job, putting them in contact with the right person for any help that they need. And trying to help them establish their own businesses. 'Cause the workers, they had the opportunity of getting five acres of land for five years, lease free.
- HY: Now did a lot of people take up that offer? Was that an offer made by C. Brewer?
- CS: Yes [it was an offer made by C. Brewer]. Not as many as I thought would have. Because the only way of life they know is plantation, that plantation mentality of there's somebody there taking care of you. You just went to work, you did your job, you went home. They don't

know what it is to run and operate their own business. You have five acres there, yes, granted. You need to know how to plan, how to do business plan, actually grow your crops or whatever you're going to do. You have to learn marketing, sales. And people here have no experience or knowledge of doing that.

And so through Huliau, that's what we've been doing—trying to teach them to start their own businesses, giving them computer skills so they can do their business plans and keep up with the modern technology. World Wide Web. Putting them in contact with the people, the marketing and planning and everything. And we've had quite a few successes. In fact, there's another farm-management class going on right now, and then next week, we have another class on the World Wide Web. And we're basically gearing it to the displaced sugar workers, the economically disadvantaged, or the native Hawaiian, also. Just trying to help people who need the help, and trying to create other economic opportunities. But there are people out there who don't want to be their own boss or create their own business. They'd rather work for somebody else.

HY: Now, they were also offered the opportunity to do ranching? Is that right?

CS: You could either go in---they have five acres for five years, lease free, for farming. Or you could get fifteen acres for five years, lease free, if you wanted to do ranching.

HY: Now were there people that wanted to do ranching?

CS: Yes.

HY: Did you find there were more people interested in ranching than farming? Or did it . . .

CS: I think it kind of balanced out, now when you look at it. 'Cause there were a lot of people who did go into ranching or were going to start ranching. And about the same amount of people that started at farming. But they basically went into long-term crops, like coffee and things like that. But what about the short term? And that's why we're trying to take these people and say, "Eh, you gotta think of the short term, also. You need to have something growing, some kind of market available for the short term. Your coffee's three years down the road. What're you going to do for the three years? What financial gain are you going to get in those three years. You know, you need to support yourself."

HY: So the people that organized this [Huliau], were they mostly people such as yourself that had been in supervisory positions?

CS: No, it was just anybody in the community—different people in the community. We have business people, we have some supervisory, housewives, college students, and just basic working people. We care for the community and try to help the people out.

HY: What about the role of the union after the layoffs? Did they provide any type of services?

CS: Well, I think they tried to assist the workers with things that they could. Basically, I think it was, again, directing them to the right source of people who could help them. They were part of negotiating in getting the five acres for the farming or fifteen acres for the ranching. They'd reimburse so much of the dues back to them. But they still make their presence

known, that they still are here, although they don't have any major role any more.

HY: When you say they make their presence known . . .

CS: Like they still threw a Labor Day get-together for the union members here. I know they're trying to unionize Mac Farms [of] Hawai'i. That's one of [tape inaudible] too, so they were involving the community in that, trying to get the community to support things like that. So you know, the ILWU is still here. And I'm sure, I guess, if they can help you, they will. But I'm salaried, so I have no idea as to how far they're extending themselves. Put it that way.

HY: How did this impact on your family, that you're aware of?

CS: Well, like my dad made an interesting comment when he said, "I'm glad my dad and my father-in-law are not here to see this." And he was—and still is, I think—rather upset at the decision that they had made. 'Cause they [CS's father and father-in-law] fought for what they got through the union. They're the ones were up there on the strike and the soup kitchens and things like that. And to have them make such a foolish decision, had to close the company, and now everybody suffers because of it. He was very angry and upset with it.

HY: When he left, when he retired, was he in a supervisory position?

CS: No, he was a bargaining-unit employee.

HY: Oh, I know. I wanted to backtrack a little bit. You worked in Punalu'u for a while in the restaurant. Can you talk about that a little bit? I kind of just glossed over that. I mean, that's such a different kind of work. Did you think, "Oh well, maybe I'll do this," or did you miss working plantation?

CS: I was upset at the plantation when I got laid off, so I really wasn't even thinking of going back, to be honest with you, at that time. I refocused on Punalu'u being reopened. And tourism was really thriving at that time. And we were doing 7[00], 800 lunches a day, you know, eighty-something dinners at night. We had the third Aspen Institute [for Humanistic Studies] in the world there, so they had their conventions and seminars there that we had to cater to. Bring breakfast, coffee breaks, poolside parties, luaus, steak fries down at the beach park, things like that.

It was a different way of life, but it was exciting, and I like meeting the different people, which was totally different than what I was used to. But I guess I'm a pretty flexible person, because I adapted so well. I mean, considering when you look at my history, I went from one extreme to the next. But I think it shaped me into the person I am today. And working through Punalu'u and working with large masses of people like that, I think that's what kind of guides my supervisory skills today, too.

Like a lot of people say I'm a people person. But when I was working in Punalu'u, you have to sort of try to figure out the needs of the people to serve them the best way you can. And so you sort of take that same philosophy in my job, like today, not knowing these people, but to try to figure out—not how you can service them, but more or less trying to figure their personality, what makes them tick, how do you get them to respond. And it's kind of dealing the same way with the customer, you know. And yet that's one of the toughest commodities

to work with, when you gotta deal with people.

HY: Unpredictable.

CS: Very. But that's what makes your job exciting, when you think about it too. It's not a basic routine every day. I went, like I say, from one extreme to the other. It shaped me, but it helped me in what I am doing today. And I guess in my outlook on the situation, the community and my involvement, I guess.

HY: Do you see yourself staying with this company? What are your feelings about that?

CS: I don't know. I haven't . . .

HY: Too soon?

CS: Yeah. I'd like to maybe someday have my own business, I think.

HY: Doing?

CS: Maybe opening a restaurant.

HY: In Punalu'u?

CS: No, here in Pāhala.

HY: Pāhala?

CS: Maybe.

HY: In the old Pāhala Theatre?

CS: No, the warehouse.

HY: The warehouse? (Chuckles)

CS: Yeah. That's an idea I've been kicking around. Sort of maybe creating it as a plantation history site. Maybe have a cultural exhibit showing all the history of the sugar in this area, and having the decor into the plantation era. Like, you can lease that building, keep it as authentic as possible, and have something where the community can relate to. And then as time goes by, people will want to know and wonder about what this area was like. 'Cause it's going to change, if sugar is out. It's going to change. They want to know what the history is about. And there isn't anything around here that will show them that. And so I think that'll be a big draw for customers. So that's just an idea I'm kicking around. So, who knows?

HY: So far—I know it's still a little early, but so far the impact of the closing on the community, what. . . . I mean, you talked about trying to help people start their farming or ranching business or whatever they want to do.

CS: The community of the plantation was very stable, solid. There's a foundation. And now

without that foundation, the foundation being the plantation, is gone. A lot of people are frightened now because their future is so uncertain. How they going to make a living? And we're certainly praying that it doesn't affect their families—you know, spouse, children abuse, alcoholism, things like that where . . .

HY: And do you think those things are on the rise because of this? Or is that not a factor? Or do you have sense of that?

CS: I think it's starting to rise. There's a lot of people, I think, here that don't know how to deal with the pressures that they're under right now. I'm not saying it's a bad problem, but people here are more frightened and insecure. I don't know if that may be the right word for it. But it's like they're lost, trying to find which direction they're going to venture off to. And they're happy when somebody---like, per se, I got a job. My clerk got a job. You know, you happy for them. But then it can also be frustrating for those who don't have a job yet, I guess. Yes, I am fortunate. But I worry about the ones that haven't gotten anything yet, now.

HY: Do people express any resentment for other people that seem to have come out of this a little bit?

CS: Some people show a little jealousy. But, no. It's a minute problem, I think. A lot of the people are just, like I say, maybe in a lost stage yet. They're not sure what they want to do or what direction they're going to go. And I can understand that, 'cause I myself, too, was frightened and really unsure of myself when I found out that it was actually happening. And as time when on, and then we finally had the last harvest, the final harvest and things like that, I mean, talk about reality hitting you in the face. But like I said, I'd say eighty-five percent of this community is still in that uncertain stage, yet. There's some who did, yeah, find jobs, but the percentage of who did and who haven't yet is, God, way off.

HY: Has crime been a factor at all since then?

CS: Well, there is some stealing going on now. And we had stealing in the past, but not as frequent. There are a lot of abuse cases, mostly with spouse or girlfriends, which was a rarity. And some thefts of articles and stuff in the homes. So now it's like, we could leave our doors open, I mean unlocked. We can't now. You sort of have to be more protective, I guess, or more aware of what's going on around you. Whereas before, you never give it a thought. So it is changing.

But a lot of it, too, is—I not only blaming because of the plantation closing. A lot of it is the island as a whole, with transients moving in and things like that, drug problems coming in. And it's bound to spread. That's why I am so deathly afraid is if it will become a problem, a real problem in the community, where thefts will be going up on the rise. Abuse—I mean, I'm certainly praying it doesn't happen, but I don't know. We're right at that turning point right now, so I just hope people realize what's going on and think before they do anything foolish.

HY: Do you have any sense of school-age children, if they're feeling the effects of any of this at all? Are they involved in more, I don't know, acting-out behavior? Do you have a sense of that?

CS: Some students, yes. I think it's affected that. I guess maybe because of the trauma at home. Maybe mom and dad are fighting a lot now, due to no money maybe. Or just the pressure of not having a job, being at home with each other constantly, day in and day out. Just personal tensions and things like that. The students have, to me I think, taken on a different attitude. It's like they're fighting for survival also, now. It's not only community. It's like they're fighting for their future, survival of the future. But there are a lot of them, too, which just gave up, which is wrong. You know, they think everything's coming to an end, and that's wrong.

Even for Huliau, we're talking about having a self-esteem, self-confidence course for families. 'Cause to me, I think that's what's falling apart right now. They're losing their own confidence. All these uncertainties are certainly [factors for why the displaced workers and their families are] turning into different people. I mean, they were strong, so solid, secure, and now all of a sudden you see this happening, and you see people are sort of withdrawing more. And we can't have that.

HY: What do you see for the future of Pāhala? I know that's kind of a big statement, but do you envision this community retaining some of the qualities that it has?

CS: I think so. Like I said, the majority of the community is people that lived here all their lives.

HY: So you folks all know each other.

CS: We all know each other. And what's surprising to me in talking to the people is that the older people are pulling to have other industries or companies or businesses come in to the area, build the area so that people have places to work. The kids will stay instead of moving away. But it's the younger adults that don't have that sense of, per se, want or desire. They want to just keep things the way they are, and we can't because we have nothing left. I mean, we have hit rock bottom. They want to keep the lifestyle. We can't. We lost that lifestyle. We have to turn and go on and create another lifestyle. Plantation is not here anymore. So how you going to keep something that's not here? But there are people, lot of people, still in denial. I don't know. Maybe they were brought up with this plantation mentality so long they don't know how to think otherwise. And that's what's hard, trying to get them to think otherwise. It's like the plantation is your parent, and they cut the apron strings. And people have to accept that. But some of them will not.

Like we have so many other economic opportunities. The majority of the people wanted it, but they don't speak out. They have that old way of you don't go and fight and yell and scream and holler. You go there, you listen to the proposals, whatever it is, and you support it or not. But what has happened here in this area is that they listen to the few loud voices, very few loud voices. And they go by that. Even they know the quiet support of the local residents here is pro, not con.

HY: Pro?

CS: Development, or, you know, like . . .

HY: Pro-business.

CS: Right. Punalu'u was going to build up their resort, the Riviera Resort. The rocket launch facility, all those things. Now we're talking about the prison. [Various proposals for development in the Ka'u area have included a spaceport, a state prison, and a resort hotel.] And it's sad. So maybe welfare reform will help, you know. We've hit rock bottom. We can't get any lower. Maybe that will help now. But something has to come in.

I look at it as, we're going to get to the point, I think, that something will have to come in. They will finally have to accept the fact that we have to have something here. They'll be forced to accept the fact, if they want to survive. And I think it's probably going to come to that point. It's going to be push or shove. Now what it is, I don't know. And to be honest with you, I don't care, as long as it provides jobs. I've worked at Punalu'u. Riviera is another resort. I went to Vandenberg Air Force Base [in California] to see what they were going to put up as a rocket launch facility, what their plans are. There's nothing wrong with it. The prison, I haven't gone to the meetings because of my shift, and they just started talking about it in the Ka'u area, so I don't know how extensive the project is going to be. But something's gotta happen. Like I said, not everybody's going to open their own business. But we need something where people can go to work. We need that. We need to get that confidence back in the community, not only in people, but the community as a whole.

But so far the community is holding together, which is nice so far. But now, like I said, with financial stresses or burdens, I don't know what's going to happen. I'm afraid, I'll be honest with you, I'm afraid. Not for myself, but for the community.

HY: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

CS: No, God, I think I said it all, really. It's just that I hope something will happen for the community, not only for us but for the children. That's my hope—something will happen, where the community will stay together, the kids can stay here and work if they want to, or have the opportunity of starting their own business—whatever it is. But we definitely need that.

HY: Okay.

CS: Okay?

HY: Thank you very much for your time.

CS: You're welcome. Well, my . . .

END OF INTERVIEW

THE CLOSING OF SUGAR PLANTATIONS:

**Interviews with Families
of Hāmākua and Kaʻū, Hawaiʻi**

Volume I

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
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August 1997